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ABSTRACT

This committee advises and makes recommendations on matters relating to quality control. During the first year of operation, the committee concentrated on the quality of retrospective records input by member libraries, the need for OCLC to give high priority to deferred records, and the definition of a unique record. The establishment of an OCLC Advisory Committee on Cataloging was endorsed and opinions from SOLINET member libraries were solicited through SOLINET Memorandum 1975-32 and a questionnaire distributed on November 4. SOLINET libraries were reminded that the quality of records input into the data base depended upon their adherence to OCLC standards. (Author)

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The Effect of the SOLINET Data Base Quality Control Committee on Member Libraries' Input

by

Lillie Caster

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of the SOLINET Data Base Quality Control Committee are to advise and recommend on matters relating to quality control. During its first year of operation, the Committee dealt with and made recommendations regarding the quality of retrospective records input by member libraries, the need for OCLC to give high priority to deferred records, and the definition of a unique record. The establishment of an OCLC Advisory Committee on Cataloging was endorsed and opinions from SOLINET member libraries were solicited through SOLINET MEMORANDUM #1975-32 and a questionnaire distributed on Nov. 4. SOLINET libraries were reminded that the quality of records input into the data base depended upon their adherence to OCLC standards.

The Effect of the SOLINET Data Base Quality Control Committee on Member Libraries' Input

I am going to be an unabashed librarian - with apologies to Marvin Scilken - in the sense that I'm not going to be bashful about doing something I've always deplored - that is, not adhering strictly to the topic listed in the program. My digression is purposeful.

The committee has been in operation for one year and it has maintained a low profile. Participating on this panel provides me, as chairperson, the opportunity (1) to tell you the kinds of activities the committee has engaged in during the past year. At the same time, hopefully, that will have a salutary effect on its profile status, and (2) to make an appeal to SOLINET member libraries. So my remarks are more in the nature of a report card. Perhaps the effects will filter through.

To set the framework, it seems useful to begin with a reading of the purposes of the Committee:

1. to review standards and procedures affecting data base quality control to determine if they are adequate and practical

2. to consider opinions and suggestions of SOLINET librarians about quality control standards and procedures

3. to review reports on the quality of SOLINET libraries' use of the data base to indentify problems and suggest solutions

4. advise the SOLINET office staff on
   a) the establishment of quality control procedures
   b) the communication of procedures to the SOLINET membership
   c) methods to solve quality control problems.

To sum up, the Committees' charge from the SOLINET Board of Directors is to review, advise, and recommend on matters pertaining to the achievement of a consistent standard of quality for records entered by participating libraries on-line into the OCLC data base. The standards dealt with are those prescribed by OCLC as the minimum acceptable content of an input record.

One of the Committee's first activities was to seek expressions regarding

quality control from SOLINET member libraries. For that purpose, SOLINET Memorandum 1975-32 was issued in August, 1975. The response was very disappointing. Most of us had just recently begun using the system and perhaps the request was a bit premature; however, we had hoped that you would keep the request in mind and communicate with us as more experience with the system was gained.

2. Any system of quality control requires more "continued inspection" of the product to maintain the level of quality deemed desirable. In our case, the mechanism for monitoring input is the error report system carried out as a part of daily terminal activity. While errors reported may be largely typographical or tagging mistakes, such errors do contribute to the degradation of the quality of the data base. OCLC supplies the SOLINET Office with quarterly summaries of these reports showing the error rates of each library in comparison with the system wide effective rate. The Committee had the opportunity of examing those reports for the last two quarters of 1975. At the time, SOLINET libraries were in rather good shape. Tomorrow morning at our meeting, available 1976 summary reports will be reviewed. Question: Are we still in good shape?

3. A recent SOLINET Memorandum announced that an OCLC Advisory Committee on Cataloging is being organized. Earlier on, the Quality Control Committee had endorsed the proposal and that endorsement was included by the SOLINET Office in its recommendation supporting the formation of the Cataloging Committee.

4. The Committee's advice was sought on the issue of the quality of retrospective records. We were asked: "Should SOLINET establish guidelines more stringent than OCLC's for the quality of records input by retrospective conversion projects?" For such projects, the search for Library of Congress

cataloging copy before input is not required by OCLC. The Committee voted as one for "more stringent guidelines." It's consensus was that full bibliographic entries would best serve the data base at this time. Otherwise, libraries should wait for Level K to become operative. The advantage of records encoded K, which has fewer mandatory variable fields than Level I, would be ready recognition by the code of the level of completeness of the records.

5. There was unanimous agreement by the members of the Committee on deferred MARC records. We had, we still do have, intense feelings about the exclusion of those records, the cornerstone of the OCLC system, from the data base. I need not go into the effects on us of deferring those records from inclusion, except to state that member libraries do "lose a major advertised benefit of the system." Although OCLC had announced earlier its plans to add the deferred records, in March the Committee authorized the chairperson to recommend high priority for the project. The letter to the Board reads in part:

> "The Committee therefore recommends the adoption of the following resolution:
>
> Resolved, that the Executive Director communicate to appropriate persons at the Ohio College Library Center the strong feeling of the SOLINET Board of Directors that a solution to the 'deferred record' problem should be achieved before any non-cataloging services are made available to participating libraries."

The Board approved; the word was duly communicated to OCLC as requested.

6. Helpful comments from four librarians were received, most gratefully, on the matter of the definition of a unique record. All things considered, specification of the conditions under which a new record can be created is most sorely needed. OCLC has been in the process of developing such a definition and the Quality Control Committee was highly desirous that SOLINET should have some input into its making. We found it to be a complicated business what with variant, opposing, and conflicting opinions on what should or should not merit the creation

of a new record. It may very well be nearly impossible to provide a definition detailing every point down to the last. As one librarian wrote: "Sticky problems are going to remain even with guidelines."

On the Committee's part, there were prolonged discussions and lengthy letters. Thanks to Kenneth A. Thomas, SOLINET Training Coordinator and Committee member, who undertook the task of synthesizing the members' opinions, putting them into writing, and producing a nine page statement towards a definition, OCLC has had since May our contribution for consideration in its own deliberations.

Perhaps one or two recommendations from the Quality Control Committee's statement would not be amiss.

The major recommendation concerned those parts of a record which should be considered in establishing the definition - namely, the descriptive elements of an entry as listed in the Anglo-American Rules, Revised Chapter 6, Rule 130A, or in terms of the data base, variable fields 245 through 500. Only those elements or fields should be included. Conversely, differences in areas other than description should preclude the creation of a new data base record. Another section of the statement noted some differences in the descriptive fields which would or would not permit the addition of a new record to the data base. Among other recommendations were:

1. the filing of an Edition Clarification Report under certain circumstances.
2. the accomodating in the data base of cataloging copy from the three U. S. national libraries as a possibility.
3. taking cognizance of the character of the cataloging of a certain non-SOLINET OCLC member library, the recommendation was made to encode as Level K all of its records entered into the data base before the issuance of standards.

The statement ended with a set of questions to be directed to Library of Congress for clarification of some of its policies and practices.

I've been speaking about specific actions at the SOLINET level--what it's

Quality Control Committee has attempted to do. Now I want to talk a moment or two about you as OCLC/SOLINET partners--that is, at the individual library level.

First, the Quality Control Committee has worked during the past year more or less on its own. But we would like very much to hear from you--your suggestions, your comments, your ideas, your opinions. They are essential for a mutually beneficial relationship. A reasonable certainty exists on my part that some of your thoughts have been devoted to how quality and its control could be improved. I solicit those thoughts through a short set of questions which has been prepared. They'll be available at the small group session for answering then or mailing later. We look forward to receiving your answers to help chart the Committee's course during its second year. That is my appeal to you.

Second and last, bibliographic records are our products. The desired level of quality for each product: the standards for input cataloging. Our partnership in the cooperative cataloging OCLC system means acceptance of those standards. Implementation and compliance to the standards are the responsibilities of each participating library. In the final analysis, the most important single determinant of cataloging quality--the excellence of the records being input on-line--is each library's adherence to those standards.

Working within the framework of its charge, the quality Control Committee has endeavored to be effective through its recommendations regarding an OCLC advisory Committee on Cataloging, guidelines for retrospective conversion projects, the definition of a unique record, and on deferred records.